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ABSTRACT

Focusing on gender as a stimulus variable, this study explored whether performer and respondent's gender and ethnicity would affect the labeling of toddler behavior. In addition, such demographic variables as age, education level, and contact with children were investigated. From a subject pool of 928, a total of 528 subjects were drawn, equally divided by gender and ethnicity. Subjects were asked to evaluate toddler behaviors on 12 Likert-type scales after viewing a 14-minute film of a white child and a black child playing spontaneously. Each toddler was presented as both a male and a female in four different treatment conditions. One of the dependent variables, "handsome-beautiful," showed a significant interaction between the toddlers and treatment condition, demonstrating that the procedures and instrument were sensitive enough to pick up statistically significant differences in viewer perceptions. The remaining 11 variables were examined via MANOVA. The emergence of a significant interaction between toddlers and ethnic/gender groups indicated further analysis was necessary. Canonical correlation analysis was used to determine the relationships between the criterion variables and nine predictor variables. The function of observer characteristics in labeling behavior was discussed and suggestions for further research were offered. (Author/RH)

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GENDER AND ETHNIC EFFECTS IN DESCRIBING TODDLER BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

From a subject pool of 928, a total of 528 subjects were drawn, equally divided by gender and ethnicity. Subjects had been asked to evaluate toddler behaviors on 12 Likert-type scales after viewing a 14-minute film of a White child and a Black child playing spontaneously. Each toddler was presented as both a male and a female in four different treatment conditions. One of the dependent variables, "handsome-beautiful," showed a significant interaction between the toddlers and treatment condition demonstrating that the procedures and instrument were sensitive enough to pick up statistically significant differences in viewer perceptions. The remaining 11 variables were examined via MANOVA. the emergence of a significant interaction between toddlers and ethnic/gender groups indicated further analysis was necessary. Canonical correlation analysis was used to determine the relationships between the criterion variables and nine predictor variables. The function of observer characteristics in labeling behavior was discussed and further research suggestions were included.

GENDER AND ETHNIC EFFECTS IN DESCRIBING TODDLER BEHAVIOR

Throughout each person's life -- from womb to tomb, so to speak -- everyone gets described in various ways in a variety of situations by a multitude of other people. Adjectives are the common descriptors used to communicate behavioral characteristics of children and adults in reductionistic terms. At times judgments about placement, punishment, and promotion --- to name but a few possibilities --- are then made based on the descriptions developed. What remains unclear is whether the descriptors used tell more about the person being observed or the observer.

One factor in particular, attractiveness, has received considerable attention of researchers who have usually used as their format photos of humans from pre-school through adulthood (Webster & Driskell, 1983 and Stephan & Langolis, 1984). In general, the more attractive the stimulus person the more often other positive descriptors were associated with the stimulus person.

However, when researchers have attempted to determine whether gender plays a significant role, either as observer or observee, in describing humans and their behavior, results have been more mixed. In fact, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) seemed to conclude that few sex differences actually were supported by research. The authors suggested that for parents the "probability of a child's behavior being noticed" may be connected in some way to the "probability level the parent unconsciously assigns to it" (p. 345). Using the Meyer and Sobieszek (1972) study to support their speculation, the authors suggested that behaviors are especially noticed if they run counter to sex-role stereotypes. In reality that study had found few differences in descriptions of toddler behavior by adults when the child was labeled male or female.

One the other hand, Unger (1979) summarized research dealing with the effects of gender as a stimulus variable and concluded that the gender of the stimulus person affected criteria for mental health, evaluations about the causes of someone's behavior, and perceptions about the value of others. Unger pointed out that illusions about sex differences are held by both females and males. She hypothesized that the "persistent evaluation biases in our society" support "the proposition that there is no such thing as identical male and female behavior" (p. 1091). Unger (1979; 1980) has also

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criticized psychological research for focusing on sex differences rather than similarities and for assuming the differences that do occur are the result of sex. In conclusion, Unger (1979) clarified the distinction between sex and gender:

> The distinction between sex and gender can assist in the generation of research hypotheses that do not assume the former is necessarily the basis for the latter. The use of the term gender makes it less likely that psychological differences between males and females will be considered explicable mainly in terms of physiological differences between them. Those who study the psychology of women are often concerned with the stimulus functions of sex---the fact that the label male or female with no additional information provided greatly alters people's view of the stimulus person described. Gender refers to the traits and behaviors considered characteristic of and appropriate to members of each sexual category (p. 1093).

At the same time, few researchers have included ethnicity as a variable in describing behavior. The few that have done so used photos and obtained mixed results. In fact, one recent study (Stephan and Langolis, 1984) that used undergraduate Black, Mexican-American, and White subjects concluded that "physical attractiveness is clearly a stronger predictor of behavioral predictions than is ethnicity" (p. 584). The same study also dropped sex of baby as a factor because their preliminary analyses showed "no distinction on the basis of infant sex" (p. 578). No study has really looked at active toddlers interacting in the same setting and asked subjects to describe their behavior.

The present research focused on gender as a stimulus variable. Specifically, this study looked at whether the same behavior was labeled differently according to both the performer's and respondent's gender and ethnicity. The research also explored differential labeling by respondent's ethnicity. In addition, demographic variables, such as age, educational level, and contact with children, were investigated.

The idea for this research was based on the earlier Meyer and Sobieszek (1972) work. That study used an adjective check list, showed two 15-minute videotapes of one White child each, and included White subjects only in its sample of 85 adults. Each child was described at times as a girl and at times as a boy. The researchers found that female subjects described children in less gender-specific ways.

Methods

Subjects

Subjects came from several sources and locations. Community groups in Colorado and southern Wyoming were solicited for participation; graduate summer classes at the University of Northern Colorado were also solicited. Subjects in the latter category tended to be temporary students taking courses for recertification while subjects in the former category tended to be service club and church members. Black undergraduate students were also contacted. Efforts were made to avoid using subjects still in their teens and to get subjects from a variety of socioeconomic levels. In addition, the film and directions were taken or mailed to contact individuals on campuses and with community groups in California, Oregon, Florida, and North Carolina. The intent of that procedure was to expand the sample of Black subjects. In the process additional White subjects were obtained, thus allowing a wider pool of subjects for later matching.

Apparatus

Film. Two 14-month-old toddlers were filmed engaging in spontaneous play. The children, one Black and one White, were closely matched developmentally according to height, weight, walking ability, and motor skills and were judged to be within the same range of attractiveness. Forty minutes of black and white film were shot over a 2 1/2-hour period and later edited to 12 minutes. The final version included an equal amount of footage of each child individually and was balanced for activity level, as well as several minutes of both children in parallel play. To minimize the effects of extraneous gender identification, the toddlers were dressed in plain shirts and diapers and went barefoot during the filming. The initials J or M were pinned on the children's shirts and the appropriate letters were superimposed in the film under the appropriate child. A musical sound track was added that was balanced for tempo and activity level of the toddlers.

Instrument. Previous research was searched to find adjective pairs that had been used to describe both gender and ethnic characteristics (Brigham, 1974; Broverman, 1970; Hamilton, 1977; Hurwitz, 1975; Imada, 1979; Koblensky, 1978; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957; Sagar & Schofield, 1980; Smedley & Bayton, 1978; Smith & Millham, 1979; Stephan & Langolis, 1980). From the literature search, 46 adjective pairs were developed that had been used in

previous research. These pairs (13 for gender, 13 for ethnicity, 10 for both, and 10 for neither) were then randomized and submitted to a panel of experts who had experience in issues surrounding gender and ethnic stereotyping. From the experts' ratings, 12 adjective pairs emerged with high consistency. Four pairs (handsome-beautiful, independent-dependent, sharing-selfish, and gentle-rough) seemed to be representative of assumed gender stereotypic traits; four pairs (slow-fast, bright-dull, busy-lazy, and dirty-clean) seemed to be representative of assumed ethnic stereotypic traits; three pairs (cooperative-competitive, emotional-rational, and active-passive) seemed to be representative of both classes of traits; and one pair (unpleasant-pleasant) seemed to be a neutral characteristic, representative of neither.

These 12 pairs were again randomized and placed at either end of a seven-choice Likert-type scale. One side of the page was for Baby J; directly across the page was the scale for Baby M. In addition, the cover page asked subjects to identify their gender, age, occupation, marital status, ethnicity, number of children, and contact with children.

Procedure

The film was shown to 928 subjects over a two-year period. The research was described as a children's early personality development project. Before viewing the film, participants were told its length, the type of questionnaire they would fill out, and the use of the initials J and M to identify the toddlers on the film. The children's names were said twice before showing the film. After viewing the film, the subjects were given the questionnaire and instructions for completing it, and the children's names were said again. Gender specific pronouns were also used when appropriate in the directions. In Treatment I the children were called John and Mike; in Treatment II, Jane and Mary; in Treatment III, John and Mary; and in Treatment IV, Jane and Mike.

Results

To equate cell size for analysis, 264 Black and 264 White subjects were randomly chosen from a subject pool of 928 subjects for analysis. It was hypothesized that the variable "handsome-beautiful" was the most sensitive to treatment effects (i.e., gender labeling) due to the implicit gender of the words in English. Therefore, that dependent or criterion variable was subjected to a three-factor repeated measures

analysis of variance. To keep the analysis model from becoming overly complex and obscuring the results, gender and ethnicity variables were combined into one variable, called group, with four levels: Black females, Black males, White females, and White males. As expected, a significant interaction between the treatment condition and toddler occurred, F (3, 1055) = 22.99, $p < .01$. In addition, there were differences between the ways Black females (M = 3.6) and White females (M = 4.1) perceived the children on the "handsome-beautiful" variable, F (2,512) = 2.70, $p < .05$. There were no significant differences between Black and White males; in fact, males as a category were not significantly different than either of the female categories.

The remaining 11 variables were examined via MANOVA. Estimates of F-ratios were calculated from Wilks' Lambdas. Not surprisingly, no overall treatment effect occurred; earlier research had demonstrated a trend away from treatment effects as the subject pool became more representative of the population at large (Rave & Hannah, 1983, 1984, 1985). Although the main effect toddler was significant, F (11, 502) = 46.13, $p < .01$, the emergence of a group X toddler interaction, F (33, 1479.69) = 1.94, $p < .01$, indicated a differential perception of the children by the various group constituencies represented in the research. No other effects or interactions were significant.

The authors were interested in determining whether group membership could be predicted based on the subjects' perceptions of each child's behavior using all criterion variables. Discriminant analysis revealed that White females and Black females could be predicted correctly approximately 45% of the time whereas White males and Black males could be predicted correctly only about 35% of the time for the White child. On the other hand, all categories except White males were somewhat less predictable for the Black child. In other words, group predictability based on all variables simultaneously examined was similar to group differences found in the examination of "handsome-beautiful" in isolation.

Canonical analysis was used to determine the relationship between the 12 criterion variables and the following predictor variables: treatment condition; gender; ethnic status; contact with children under three years of age on a weekly basis (CWC); employment, organizations or volunteer projects in which subjects had direct involvement with children under three years of age in the past three years (EOP); and the two children used in the film. Three canonical correlations were statistically

significant (see table 1). The standardized canonical weights for all variables were then examined (see Table 2).

On the first canonical correlation, the variables "competitive" and "selfish" contributed most to the perceptions of the Black child by all subjects. In addition, "rough" (.56) and "active" (-.56) were highly correlated with the derived criterion canonical variable. However, a moderate intercorrelation between "gentle-rough" and "cooperative-competitive" (r = .46) demonstrates the similar pull of those two variables. The canonical variables involved with the first canonical correlation accounted for roughly 15% of the total variance. While this statistic, or any other single statistic, cannot be used solely to evaluate the complex relationships of any multivariate analysis, it is reported in this study to help the reader keep a perspective regarding the results.

On the second canonical correlation, the predictor variables ethnicity and to a lesser extent age and education were associated with "clean," "rational," and "bright" with both children. In other words, White "baby-boomers" with a college education tended to perceive both children as "cleaner," more "rational," and less bright than others in the sample. However, these associations only accounted for approximately 1.5% of the total variance of the sample.

With the third canonical correlation, gender and education are the predominant variables associated with "pleasant" and "clean." There is a weaker association which includes ethnicity, EOP, and treatment effects as well as "rational" and "gentle." Thus, the subjects involved were primarily in treatment levels III and IV (boy-girl, girl-boy), females, predominantly Black, and had less contact with children outside the home than other subjects. These associations accounted for about 1% of the variance.

Discussion

Although the earlier Meyer and Sobieszek (1972) study found that White females perceived a wider range of characteristics for both the male and female toddler used in their study, the present researchers thought more variables ought to be studied in perceptions of behavior than gender alone. Therefore, a greater diversity of subjects was used and more respondent information was obtained. The decision was also made not to limit the stimulus (the toddlers on the film) nor the subjects in the study to Whites only. The researchers

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speculated that the presentation medium was also important and chose to use film rather than videotape or photographs. Informal feedback from subjects after viewing the film indicated that they were able to relate to the images of the children, that the behavior of the toddlers was typical of that age group, and that the film was "professionally" done and interesting to watch.

Surprisingly, treatment effects had much less impact on results than expected. Simply changing the names of the children to either a male or a female was not sufficient stimulus to affect the consistency in which subjects evaluated the toddlers' behaviors. However, there was a trend in the data which demonstrated that the social context of the subjects played a greater role in labeling effects than the name assigned to the child. This trend appeared to cut across ethnicity and was more related to highly educated females. In fact, highly educated Black females who had little overall contact with children and older White females, who in this study were more highly educated, appear to be responsible for influencing the results of the entire female sample. These Black females tended to see the children as more pleasant, more clean, more rational, and more gentle. There was a greater association with more rational and more gentle when the White child was named Jane and the Black child Mike. These white females tended to see the children as more busy, more pleasant, and more active.

The predominant effect in the experiment was the rating differential between the Black child and the White child. The Black child was associated more consistently across all treatments by all groups as more competitive, more selfish, more active, and more rough. On the other hand, across all treatments the White child was not associated with a particular pattern of criterion variables. The reason for a consistent pattern associated with one child and not the other is unknown. One explanation may be that the toddlers as portrayed on film were really that different; another possibility is that subjects have been exposed to a larger number and wider diversity of models for Whites in the general culture and, thus, no consistent patterns emerged. A third explanation could be that subjects projected past values, mores, or stereotypes of the dominant culture.

Additionally, the more educated White "baby-boomers" showed greater response consistency than most subjects in their reactions to both children; they saw both toddlers as more

clean, more rational, and less bright than other subjects did. For all other males in the sample the responses were far more diffuse and no particular pattern emerged.

Overall, several unexpected factors may have affected the outcomes of the research project. Regardless of the efforts to balance the activity level of the toddlers in the film through editing, individual differences in activity level of the toddlers may still have occurred in the final film version. In addition, the instrument itself may have forced subjects to discriminate between the toddlers' behavior when an adjective check list or some other format might have allowed more flexibility in responses. Surprisingly, less than 1.5% of the subjects rated the two children exactly the same or rated both children right down the middle of the scales. An an aside, the authors wondered how 14-month-old toddlers really could be rated on some of the criterion variables, e.g., "emotional-rational."

An important finding of the study is that individual differences within all subjects were responsible for their evaluation of the two toddlers in the film. Although certain subgroups were identified above, the predictive power is limited. This lack may be due to a less than ideal heterogeneous grouping of males and females, Blacks and Whites with respect to other important subject variables identified in the study. Education in particular varied between treatment groups. Another possibility is that other nonmeasured variables were associated with the unaccounted for variance.

It would not be unexpected to discover that the process of determining differences between groups, i.e., mean group differences, caused important subject differences to be cancelled out by the averaging process. Perhaps a sacrifice in N with an increase in the number of observations per subject in diverse situations would be more telling. In other words, repeated measurements over time in a naturalistic setting would expose the individual's response pattern to the changing environment as opposed to an artificially-induced situation, a controlled study.

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Author Notes

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Table 1

Canonical Correlation Analysis

Canonical Correlation	Standard Error	df	F
.640	.018	96, 6827.51	7.83*
.286	.029	77, 6077.76	2.37*
.198	.030	60, 5317.72	1.57*
.152	.030	45, 4543.44	1.18
.128	.031	32, 3748.42	.92
.079	.031	21, 2920.83	.60
.062	.031	12, 2036	.51
.046	.031	5, 1019	.43

*$p \leq .01$

Table 2

Standardized Canonical Coefficients for Predictor and Criterion Variables

Experimental Variables	Canonical Coefficients 1	2	3
	Criterion Variables		
Handsome	-.009	.015	-.021
Slow	.112	.217	-.070
Cooperative	.304	.047	.020
Bright	.003	.398	-.101
Busy	-.143	.044	-.105
Emotional	-.019	.441	.297
Independent	-.169	-.142	-.218
Sharing	.452	.094	-.092
Unpleasant	-.197	.097	.851
Gentle	.050	.222	.291
Dirty	.002	.653	-.504
Active	-.190	.129	-.250
	Predictor Variables		
Treatment	-.014	-.094	.310
Toddlers	.998	.028	.019
Gender	-.012	-.064	.710
Age	.013	.322	-.216
Ethnicity	-.033	.649	-.371
Education	-.008	.333	.666
CWC	.033	.206	-.073
EOP	.032	-.186	-.311